

El Greco

Doménikos Theotokópoulos (Greek language: Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος, 1541–7 April 1614), most widely known as **El Greco** (Spanish language for "The Greek"), was a painter, sculptor, and architect of the Spanish Renaissance. The nickname "El Greco" refers both to his Greek origin and Spanish citizenship. The artist normally signed his paintings with his full birth name in Greek alphabet: Δομήνικος Θεοτοκόπουλος (*Doménikos Theotokópoulos*), often adding the word Κρής (*Krēs*, "Cretan"). El Greco is regarded as a precursor of both Expressionism and Cubism.



El Greco, c. 1595-1600: 'Portrait of a Man / Self-portrait?', oil-painting on canvas; current location: Metropolitan Museum of Art New York

Contents

Quotes of El Greco

Quotes about El Greco

contemporaries

1614 - 1750

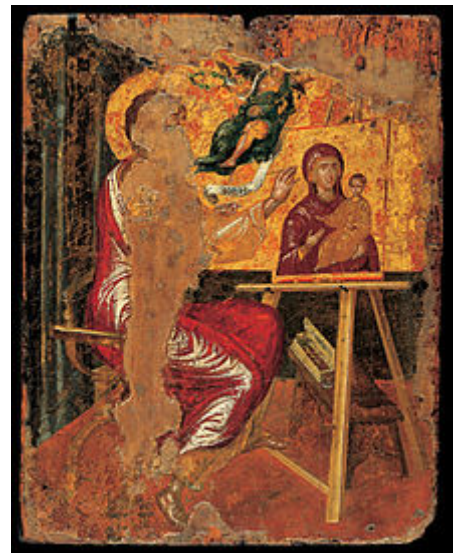
1900 - 2000

after 2000

External links

Quotes of El Greco

- I hold the imitation of colour to be the greatest difficulty of art.
- una es la imitación de los colores que yo tengo por la mayor dificultad
 - Quote from notes of El Greco, in one of his commentaries; as cited by Fernando Marías and Agustín Bustamante García in *Las Ideas Artísticas de el Greco* (Cátedra, 1981), p. 80; taken from Wikipedia/El Greco: in 'Technique and Style'
- ..he [= Michelangelo] was a good man, but he did not know how to paint.
 - Marina Lambraki-Plaka, *El Greco - The Greek*, p. 47–49; as quoted on Wikipedia/El Greco
 - Quote of El Greco's response, when he was later asked what he thought about the Italian artist Michelangelo
- Now, in order to claim some knowledge of painting, Vitruvius speaks of the consideration of the perfect human body and about how good sculptors and painters in order to make it give it a height of ten faces, and I say that according to them they have read and they say that this proportion is based on knowledge of measurement and that it happens that without it it is not possible to have proportion or consideration because those who are not cognizant of this do not count.
 - quoted by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, in *The Emergence of Modern Architecture: A Documentary History from 1000 to 1810* (Routledge, New York, 2004) p. 165
- If Vasari really knew the nature of the Greek style of which he speaks, he would deal with it differently in what he says. He compares it with Giotto, but what Giotto did is simple in comparison, because the Greek style is *full of ingenious difficulties* [= translation of Greek art historian Nicos Hadjinicolaou] *full of deceptive difficulties*. [= translation of Spanish art historians Xavier de Salas and Fernando Marías].



El Greco, c. 1560-67: 'St Luke Painting the Virgin', icon, on wood?; current location: Benaki Museum Athens

- Quote of El Greco, as cited in 'Hand-written Note Shows El Greco Defending Byzantine Style In Face Of Western Art', Dec. 2008
- the different translation by Nicos Hadjinicolaou leads him to the conclusion that El Greco was defending Byzantine art; which is rejected by Fernando María
- **I am neither bound to say why I came to this city nor to answer the other questions put to me.**
 - Quote from a report of the municipal of Toledo, c. September 1579; as quoted by Albert F. Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in: *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works* publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, p. 76
 - this answer El Greco gave to the Mayor of Toledo, when asked - in connection with the writ served on him for the commissioned painting 'The Disrobing of Christ / The Expolio' - whether he had been brought to Toledo to paint the retablo of Santo Domingo (containing 15 paintings of El Greco [2])
- **..because in this way the form will be perfect and not reduced, which is the worst thing that can happen to a figure.**
 - Quote of El Greco, 1582-84; as cited by Marina Lambraki-Plaka, in *El Greco*, p. 57-59; as quoted in Wikipedia/El Greco: 'Technique and Style'
 - on making his painting 'The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception' El Greco asked permission to lengthen the altarpiece itself by another 1.5 feet (0.46 m) - the human body became even more otherworldly in his later works
- **Anyway, I would not be happy to see a beautiful, well-proportioned woman, no matter from which point of view however extravagant, not only lose her beauty in order to, I would say increase in size according to the law of vision, but no longer appear beautiful, and, in fact, become monstrous.**
 - Quote from marginalia, which El Greco inscribed in his copy of Daniele Barbaro's translation of Vitruvius' *De architectura*, as quoted by Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis in *The Emergence of Modern Architecture: A Documentary History from 1000 to 1810* Routledge, New York, 2004) p. 165
- **It has been necessary to show the Hospital de Tavera as a model, for the building hides the Usagra Gate, and the dome obscures part of the town, and once treated as a model and moved from its place, it seemed better to me to show the main façade...the rest, and its proper relationship to the town can be seen on the plan. Also, in the representation of Our Lady presenting the chasuble to Saint Ildefonso, in making the figures large, I have applied, in some way the observation made of celestial bodies that an illuminated body seen at a distance may appear large although it be small.**
 - Quote of an inscription, composed by El Greco, c. 1608, on the plan of Toledo, in his painting 'View and Plan of Toledo'; as quoted on Outline Biography of El Greco - (documented facts of his life)
- **[El Greco 'confined to his bed'] ..holding, believing and confessing the Faith of the Holy Church of Rome.. ..in whose Faith I have lived and die, as a faithful and Catholic Christian..because of the gravity of my sickness I was unable to make a will and gives power to Jorge Manuel Toxotocopuli my son, and of Doña Jerónima de las Cuevas [his wife he never married], who is a person of honesty and virtue [to make his testament, arrange his burial, and pay his debts, and the] remainder of my possessions to go to Jorge Manuel, as universal heir.**
 - Quote of El Greco, 31 March 1614; as cited in Outline Biography of El Greco - documented facts of his life



El Greco, c. 1568: 'Mount Sinai', tempera on panel; current location: Galleria Estense Modena, Italy



El Greco, c. 1571-72: 'Portrait of Giulio Clovio', oil-painting on canvas; current location: National Museum of Capodimonte Naples

Quotes about El Greco

sorted chronologically by date of the quotes about El Greco

contemporaries

- **..There has arrived in Rome a young man [El Greco] from Candia [Crete], a disciple of Titian, who in my opinion is a painter of rare talent; among other things he has painted a portrait of himself, which causes wonderment to all the painters in Rome. I should like him to be under the patronage of your Illustrious and Reverend Lordship, without any other contribution towards his living than a room in the Farnese Palace for some little time, until he can find other accommodation. I therefore beg and pray you to have the kindness to write to Count Lodovico, your Majordomo, to provide him with some room near the top in the said Palace; your Illustrious Lordship will be doing a virtuous deed worthy of you, and I shall feel very grateful...The most humble servant, Julio Clovio.**
 - Julio Clovio, in a letter from Venice, Nov. 1570, to Cardinal Nepote Farnese in Rome; as quoted by Albert F. Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in: *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works* publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, p. 27
 - this letter is the irrefutable proof of El Greco's stay in Venice; the much older and celebrated miniature painter commends his young compatriot - who, he states, is coming to Rome - to the patronage of the Cardinal
- **..foreigners flock to see and admire the painting, and the citizens of Toledo never tire of seeing it, as there is always something new to see, for here is portrayed, very life-like, the notable men of our time.**
 - Alonso de Villegas[3] 1586, in 'Flos Sanctorum'[4], 1578; as quoted on Outline Biography of El Greco - (documented facts of his life)
- **..by a Dominico Greco....who paints excellent things in Toledo, is a painting of Saint Maurice and his soldiers, which he made for the altar of the Saints, and is now in the Chapter House; it did not please His Majesty, but that is not surprising, for it pleased few, although it is said it is of much art and that there are many excellent things by his hand.**
 - Padre Sigüenza, c. 1605, in *Historia de la Orden de San Jerónimo* 1608; as quoted on Outline Biography of El Greco - (documented facts of his life)
 - Philip II commissions the 'Martyrdom of Saint Maurice'[5] and his Legions for one of the chapels of the church of the Escorial. On 25th April 1580, the King orders the Prior of the Escorial to provide El Greco with materials, 'especially ultramarine'.... The painting, executed in Toledo, completed 1582. El Greco paid 800 ducados. The painting did not satisfy the King Philip II, so it was not placed in a chapel, but in the Chapterhouse
- **[El Greco liked] the colors crude and unmixed in great blots as a boastful display of his dexterity. he believed in constant repainting and retouching in order to make the broad masses tell flat as in nature.**
 - Francisco Pacheco as quoted by A. E. Landon, the *Reincarnation Magazine* 1925 p. 330; taken from Wikipedia/El Greco: 'Technique and style'
 - Francisco Pacheco was a Spanish painter and art-theoretician who visited El Greco in 1611, in Toledo
- **El Greco showed me in 1611 a cupboard full of clay models made by him to serve him in his work, and, a marvel beyond compare, the originals of every picture he had ever painted in his life, all in oils, on smaller canvasses, collected together in a hall which his son showed me by his orders.**
 - Francisco Pacheco as quoted in *Art in Spain, under the patronage of the Hispanic Society of America - EL GRECO*; text by Manuel Bartolomé Cossío transl. Royall Tyler; publisher Hijos de J. Thomas, Barcelona, 1909, p. 7 [6]
 - the clay models were set down in the Inventory
- **Who will believe me if I say that Dominico Greco set his hand to his canvases many and many times over that he worked upon them again and again...but to leave the colours crude and unblent in great blots, as a boastful display of his dexterity I call this working in order to accomplish little.**
 - Francisco Pacheco as quoted in *Art in Spain, under the patronage of the Hispanic Society of America - EL GRECO*; text by Manuel Bartolomé Cossío transl. Royall Tyler; publisher Hijos de J. Thomas, Barcelona, 1909, p. 8 [7]



El Greco, c. 1577-79: 'El Expolio / The Disrobing of Christ', oil-painting on canvas; current location: Cathedral of Toledo, Sacristía

- On 7th April, 1614, died Domenico Greco. He left no will. He received the sacraments, was buried in Santo Domingo el Antiguo; and gave candles.

- in folio (332. 1) of the *Book of Funerals for the Parish of Santo Tomé*, 1601-1614; discovered and published in 1876 by the Keeper of the Records of Toledo, Señor Foradada; & quoted by Albert F Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works* publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909 p. 20
- Out of the great esteem he was held in he was called the Greek (il Greco).
 - Giulio Cesare Mancini (c. 1618), in his *Chronicles*, as quoted by P. Prevelakis, *Theotocópoulos - Biography* p. 47; taken from Wikipedia/El Greco: 'Notes'
 - Mancini's *Chronicles* were written a few years after El Greco's death, 1614; According to Mancini El Greco acquired his name not only for his place of origin, but also for the sublimity of his art
- Mancini reports that El Greco said to the Pope [in Rome] that if the whole work [Michelangelo's *Last Judgment* in the Sistine Chapel] was demolished, he himself would do it in a decent manner and with seemliness.
 - Giulio Cesare Mancini (c. 1618), in his 'Chronicles'; as quoted by Michael Scholz-Hansel, *El Greco*; (first publication 1949), Taschen Basic Art, 2004 p. 92
- one of the greatest men in both this [Spanish] kingdom and outside it.
 - quote, c. 1615, by The Minutes of the commission of 'The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception' [8] (1607–1613), describing El Greco; as quoted by J. Gudiol, *El Greco*, p. 252; taken from Wikipedia/El Greco: in 'Mature works and later Years'
- Crete gave him life and the painter's craft, Toledo a better homeland, where through Death he began to achieve eternal life.
 - Hortensio Félix Paravicino c. 1614-30; as quoted by L. Berg, *El Greco in Toledo*, kaiku.com. Archived from the original; taken from Wikipedia/El Greco: 'Mature works and later Years'
- Crete gave him life and Toledo his pencil./ Creta le dio y los pinceles Toledo.
 - Hortensio Félix Paravicino after 1614 - in his sonnet dedicated to Greco's tomb; as quoted by Albert F Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in: *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works* publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, p. 25



El Greco, c. 1577-80: 'The Adoration of the Name of Jesus / The Dream of Philip II / The Gloria of Greco', oil-painting on canvas; current location: El Escorial - quote of Padre Santos[1], c. 1657: 'A 'Gloria' by Domineko Greco, among the best which he painted, although still with great want of harmony in the colours, though here there is some excuse, for to paint the Glory of God it is not easy to find suitable colours, for the most vivid cannot attain to the signification of the strength of that supreme Majesty.'

1614 - 1750

- A 'Gloria' by Domineko Greco, among the best which he painted, although still with great want of harmony in the colours, though here there is some excuse, for to paint the Glory of God it is not easy to find suitable colours, for the most vivid cannot attain to the signification of the strength of that supreme Majesty either seen nor heard of men.
 - Padre Santos[9] in his *Descripcion del Escorial* c. 1657; as quoted by Albert F Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in: *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works* publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, p. 118
 - here is described a famous work of El Greco 'The Dream of Philip II', usually called in Spain 'The Gloria of Greco' - located in the Chapter hall of the Escorial; the first mention of this picture is made by Padre Santos, c. 1657
- At that time, there came from Italy a painter called Dominico Greco.. He settled in the famous and ancient city of Toledo, introducing such an extravagant style that to this day nothing has been seen to equal it; attempting to discuss it would cause confusion in the soundest minds; his works being so dissimilar that they do not seem to be by the same hand. He came to this city with a high reputation, so much so that he

gave it to be understood that there was nothing superior to his works. In truth, he achieved some works which are worthy of estimation, and which can be put amongst those of famous painters. His nature was extravagant like his painting. It is not known with certainty what he did with his works, as he used to say no price was high enough for them, and so he gave them in pledge to their owners who willingly advanced him what he asked for. He earned many ducats, but spent them in too great pomp and display in his house, to the extent of keeping paid musicians to entertain him at meal-times. His works were many but the only wealth he left were two hundred unfinished paintings; he reached an advanced age, always enjoying great fame. He was a famous architect, and very eloquent in his speeches. He had few disciples, as none cared to follow his capricious and extravagant style, which was only suitable for himself.

- Jusepe Martinez, c. 1673-75, in *Practical Discourses on the most Noble art of Painting / Discursos practicables del nobilísimo arte de la pintura*; as quoted by Albert F. Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in: *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works*; publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, pp. 75-76

1900 - 2000



El Greco, c. 1580-82: 'The Martyrdom of St Maurice', oil-painting on canvas; current location: El Escorial; - quote of Padre Sigüenza, c. 1605: '...by a Dominico Greco... is a painting of Saint Maurice and his soldiers, which he made for the altar of the Saints, and is now in the Chapter House; [because] it did not please His Majesty [Philip II,] but that is not surprising, for it pleased few.'

- Our painter's very name [El Greco] is uncertain. To his contemporaries he was known as the Greco, the difficult Theotocopuli, barbarous to the Spaniards, being disregarded; and up to the end of the eighteenth century no one writes of him except as Dominico Greco. Pacheco, Palomino, Giuseppe Martinez and other native writers, who mention his work, use this name. It is also the name found in the Inventories of the palace, the registers of Toledo, and the indices of public writings.
- Albert F. Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley, in *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works*; publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, p. 17
- In his picture of 'St Paul the Apostle' in the sacristy of Toledo cathedral, and also in all the known replicas of the picture, the epistle which the saint holds in his hands bears the inscription in Greek: 'Upos TDV TYJS XPITtoV 'E'xxX.rfiias irpuTDV C7rt O''ypirov yeipoTOveOevra' (translation: Titus ordained the first bishop of the Cretans).
- as quoted by Albert F. Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works*; publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, pp. 24-25
- ..even more important.. ..is the splendid seated full-length of Don Fernando Neno de Guevara Inquisitor and Archbishop of Seville... Greco never indicated character more vitally and surely. The execution is that of his best period; that in which, his age and his genius having both come to maturity, he was completely master of his medium. Compare this great, almost unknown, portrait with the famed 'Innocent X.' of Velazquez - the colour is the same - a wonderful combination of reds and whites - the technique is alike, and further, the spirit of the two pictures is the same. No one can remain in doubt of the influence that Greco exercised over his great successor. The question forces itself upon us - Can Velazquez have seen this portrait?
- Albert F. Calvert, and Catherine Gasquoine-Hartley in: *THE SPANISH SERIES - El Greco; an account of his life and works*; publisher, London: J. Lane; New York: J. Lane Co, 1909, p. 144
- We refer with pleasure and with steadfastness to the case of El Greco, because the glory of this painter is closely tied to the evolution of our new perceptions on art
- Franz Marc, 1914 in 'Blaue Reiter', p. 75-76; as quoted on Wikipedia/El Greco, in: 'Postumus critical reputation'
- He [El Greco] has discovered a realm of new possibilities. Not even he, himself, was able to exhaust them. All the generations that follow after him live in his realm. There is a greater difference between him and Titian, his master, than between him and Renoir or Cézanne. Nevertheless, Renoir and Cézanne are masters of impeccable originality because it is not possible to avail yourself of El Greco's language, if in using it, it is not invented again and again, by the user

- Julius Meier-Graefe, c. 1908, *The Spanish Journey*, p. 458; as quoted on Wikipedia/El Greco, in: 'Postumus critical reputation'
- Julius Meier-Graefe, a scholar of French Impressionism, traveled in Spain in 1908 and became fascinated by El Greco; he recorded this in *Spanische Reise* (*Spanish Journey*, published in English, 1926)
- During the course of the execution of a commission for the Hospital de Tavera [in Toledo], El Greco fell seriously ill, and a month later, on 7 April 1614, he died. A few days earlier, on 31 March, he had directed that his son Jorge Manuel should have the power to make his will.
- Michael Scholz-Hansel, *El Greco*; (first publication 1949), Taschen Basic Art, 2004 p. 81
- In any case, only the execution counts. From this point of view it is correct to say that Cubism has a Spanish origin and that I invented Cubism. We must look for the Spanish influence in Paul Cézanne. Things themselves necessitate it, the influence of El Greco, a Venetian painter, on him. But his structure is Cubist.
- Pablo Picasso, speaking of *Les Femmes d'Alger* to Dor de la Souchère in 'Antibes'; as quoted by D. de la Souchère *Picasso à Antibes*, p. 15; taken from Wikipedia/El Greco, in: 'Postumus critical reputation'
- On 22 February 1950, Picasso began his series of 'paraphrases of other painters works' with 'The Portrait of a Painter after El Greco'
- It was a great moment. A pure righteous conscience stood on one tray of the balance, an empire on the other and it was you, man's conscience, that tipped the scales. This conscience will be able to stand before the Lord at the Last Judgement and not be judged. It will judge, because human dignity, purity and valor fill even God with terror... Art is not submission and rules, but a demon which smashes the moulds... Greco's inner-archangel's breast had thrust him on savage freedom's single hope, this world's most excellent garret.
- quote by Nikos Kazantzakis, *Report to Greco*, transl. P.A. Bien; Simon and Schuster, New York, 1965
- Let's face it, nobody could paint eyes like El Greco, and nobody can paint eyes like Walter Keane.
- Walter Keane; as quoted by Jane Howard in *The Man Who Paints Those Big Eyes: The Phenomenal Success of Walter Keane*, 'Life (magazine)' 59, no. 9 (27 August 1965), p. 39
- Walter Keane is referring to himself in the third person, taking credit for the 'Big Eye' paintings of his wife, Margaret Keane
- As I was climbing the narrow rain-slicked lane - nearly three hundred years have gone by - I felt myself seized by the hand of a Powerful Friend [= El Greco] and indeed I came to see myself lifted on the two enormous wings of Doménicos up to his skies which this time were full of orange trees and water speaking of the homeland.
- Odysseas Elytis, 1981, in *Diary from an April As Yet Unseen*; as quoted on Wikipedia/El Greco, in: 'Postumus critical reputation'



El Greco, c. 1580-85: 'The Virgin of the Immaculate Conception and St John', oil-painting on canvas; current location: Museum of Santa Cruz, Toledo - quote of El Greco, c. 1580: '...because in this way the form will be perfect and not reduced, which is the worst thing that can happen to a figure' - (El Greco asked permission to lengthen the altarpiece itself by another 1.5 feet)

after 2000

- Once in Spain, El Greco was able to create a style of his own - one that disavowed most of the descriptive ambitions of painting. Obviously his portraits involved precise observation, but the settings tend to be spectral.
- Nicholas Penny, 'At the National Gallery', *Vbl.* 26 No. 5 - 4 March 2004 [10]

- ..using abstraction and avoiding literal illusionism, the artist [= El Greco] diverts the mind to the spiritual essence..El Greco made it clear that his heavenly figures are not members of the material world.
- David Davies, in the principal essay in the exhibition catalogue of The National Gallery, as quoted by Nicholas Penny 'At the National Gallery', Vol. 26 No. 5. - 4 March 2004, by Nicholas Penny

External links

- [170 iamges of El Greco's paintings, on Wikiart](#)
- [El Greco – Biography Style and Artworks](#)
- [El Greco – The Complete Works at the El Greco Foundation](#)
- [El Greco's Gallery](#)
- [Tour: El Greco \(Spanish, 1541–1614\) at the National Gallery of Art](#)



El Greco, c. 1595-1596: 'The Holy Family / La Sagrada Familia junto a Santa Ana', oil-painting on canvas; current location: Museum Hospital de Tavera Toledo



El Greco, 1590-1600: 'St. Jerome', oil-painting on canvas; current location: Frick Collection Manhattan, N.Y.C.



El Greco, c. 1608: 'View and Plan of Toledo', oil-painting on canvas; current location: El Greco Museum, Toledo; - quote of El Greco: *'It has been necessary to show the Hospital de Tavera as a model, for the building hides the Vsagra Gate, and the dome obscures part of the town, and once treated as a model and moved from its place, it seemed better to me to show the main façade... the rest, and its proper relationship to the town can be seen on the plan.'*



El Greco, c. 1603-1614: 'Saint Ildefonso', oil-painting on canvas; current location: National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C. Gallery 28; - quote of El Greco: *'Also, in the representation of Our Lady presenting the Chasuble to Saint Ildefonso, in making the figures large, I have applied, in some way the observation made of celestial bodies that an illuminated body seen at a distance may appear large although it be small'*



El Greco, c. 1610-1614: Laocoön', oil-painting

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